

Christian Growth Course – Lesson 13

Keeping Right Relationships

Introduction: The devil wants to divide and alienate people. He sows resentment and hatred. Christ wants to unite and reconcile people. He sows peace and love. Human beings will always have differences and conflicts. If these last and are not settled, they serve the devil's purpose. The attitude of Christ in us can settle differences and break down dividing walls in family, church, neighborhood, at work, or in any relationship. Jesus has given us principles that will heal relationships. Let's look at where conflicts come from and what we can do about them.

1. The main root source of conflicts and offenses between people is pride and self-centeredness - Matthew 18:1-5.
 - A. The problem: We are all concerned with "Who is the greatest?" (best, richest, rightest, smartest, most admired, most loved, has most authority, etc.). When my attention is on me, conflict with others is bound to develop.
 - B. The solution: "Death to self" - Galatians 2:20.
 - 1) Matthew 18:3, 4 - See yourself as a little child in relation to others.
 - 2) Philippians 2:5-8 - Voluntarily lay down your rights.
 - 3) Ephesians 5:21 - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
 - 4) Philippians 2:3, 4 - count others better than yourselves.
 - 5) John 13:3-17 - Wash one another's feet.

2. We cannot afford the cost of broken relationships - Matthew 18:6.
 - A. The cost to the offender
 - 1) "Better to be drowned in the sea."
 - 2) God will not accept his worship - Matthew 5:23, 24; Hebrews 12:14.
 - B. Cost to others around
 - 1) Family members - bitterness
 - 2) The church - division
 - 3) Unbelievers - repelled - John 17:20, 21; Philippians 2:14-16
 - C. Do not let yourself be responsible for alienation or unresolved conflict - Romans 12:18.
 - 1) Repair small breaks or strains in relationships before they grow.
 - 2) Build bridges of communication.

- 3) Take the offensive in showing love. Return good for evil - Romans 12:17, 21.
- 4) Don't stand on your rights - you might get them.
- 5) You will be blessed - Matthew 5:9.

3. We must determine and eliminate causes of offense and alienation - Matthew 18:7-14.

A. Determining the cause of offense: What do you contribute to the conflict? Matthew 7:1-5

- 1) There are very few one-sided offenses.
- 2) Look honestly at what upsets your mate, child, parent, brother, sister.
- 3) How do my reactions add to the conflict?
 - a. Maybe the other person's faults are not extraordinary, but my reaction to them is too strong.
 - b. Maybe I am too sensitive about my rights.
 - c. Others will not stop sinning. The solution has to lie in my reactions.
 - d. This is the secret of peace and freedom.

B. Removing the causes of offense:

- 1) The language (cut off arm, gouge out eye) indicates the urgency of removing causes of sin and offense. Souls are being lost.
- 2) My pride and selfishness are not worth it.
- 3) Love will pay the cost of peace and reconciliation.
 - a. Jesus paid a tax he didn't owe - Matthew 17:24-27.
 - b. "Why not rather allow yourselves to be cheated" - 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.
 - c. Abraham gave Lot first choice of the land to avoid strife - Genesis 13: 8-11.
- 4) Deal with offenses now. Don't let your pride or selfishness destroy God's child - Romans 14:13, 15, 19, and 21.

4. Follow God's order of clearing up offenses - Matthew 18:15-20; 5:23-26.

A. Go to the one who has wronged you and tell him or her, not others.

- 1) We usually want to tell everyone else because of our anger.
- 2) Many people tell church leaders their grievances before they have told the offender.

- B. Go in humility and gentleness - Galatians 6:1. Anger makes the other person defensive and creates barriers.
 - C. Do this quickly before the conflict grows, involves others, and hardens hearts.
 - 1) We pay a terrible price for rejecting the wisdom of the scriptures.
 - 2) Conflicts last for years, even for a lifetime, because of pride.
 - 3) If there is enough love and enough concern for the welfare of the family, church, office or neighborhood, people can find a way.
5. Forgive as God forgives - Matthew 18:21-35.
- A. Forgiveness is not an option, if we want to be saved - Matthew 6:12, 14, and 15.
 - 1) Unforgiveness is the "unforgivable sin" that we are most likely to commit.
 - 2) Why should we expect God to do for us what we will not do for others?
 - 3) Vengeance belongs to God - Romans 12:19.
 - B. Forgiveness is an act of the will, not a feeling.
 - 1) Like love, it is commanded.
 - 2) We can decide to act forgiving. Feeling will follow.
 - C. Unforgiveness keeps relationships broken.
 - 1) Unresolved resentment buried in the heart of a husband or wife poisons a marriage (even resentment toward a parent, brother, sister, or someone else).
 - 2) Our anger and resentment give the devil opportunities in our lives - James 1:20; Ephesians 4:26, 27.
 - D. Forgiveness restores and heals relationships.
 - 1) If anyone asks forgiveness, we must give it immediately from the heart, for we are also sinners.
 - 2) A spirit of forgiveness is necessary even before the other person repents.
 - a. Christ prayed for his murderers - Luke 23:34.
 - b. A spirit of forgiveness does not quickly take offense - 1 Peter 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:6, 7.
 - c. When one person has a spirit of forgiveness and reaches across, it makes it easier for the other person to come across.

Conclusion: In dealing with offenses, we are called to "overcome evil with good" - Romans 12:20, 21. The good you do will often melt the heart of the one who was against you - 1 Samuel 24, 26.

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